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SUBJECT: TAMAULIPAS: BEST PRACTICES FOR FIGHTING DENGUE FEVER IN MEXICO

REF: MEXICO 5704

¶1. On November 8, Consulate Matamoros and Consulate Monterrey Econoffs met with Tamaulipas Secretary of Health, Dr. Rodolfo Torre Cantu, to discuss the state's success in battling dengue fever. Despite record rainfalls throughout northeastern Mexico, Tamaulipas represents a significantly lower percentage of the number of new cases in the region, compared with Veracruz, Nuevo Leon, and Coahuila (reftel). According to Dr. Torre, the Tamaulipas state government learned from its mistake during the 2005 epidemic when, due in large part to the state's inaction, dengue infected over 6,000 people in the state.

¶2. In response to the 2005 epidemic, Tamaulipas instituted a dengue prevention program that has been hailed as a "best practice" by the Mexican Ministry of Health. The campaign, according to Dr. Torre, is the reason why the number of new dengue cases in Tamaulipas has been relatively low compared with states like Nuevo Leon and Veracruz. The program is aimed at school-aged children and uses a Tamaulipeco cartoon character to get children to understand the causes of dengue so that they can, in turn, educate their parents. The children are "deputized" as official Tamaulipas health inspectors and are charged with identifying and eradicating mosquito breeding grounds in and around their homes. A catchy song helps them to remember to check the places where mosquitoes can flourish. Regular TV and radio spots also use the cartoon character and song to provide children and parents with dengue prevention tips. "The program has been so successful," said Dr. Torre, "that the Mexican Health Ministry asked us to put our program information and materials onto a CD-Rom that has now been distributed to every Mexican state Secretary of Health."

¶3. Despite the state's success, Dr. Torre worries that inaction on the part of neighboring states Nuevo Leon and Veracruz could affect Tamaulipas. He also noted that the virus is evolving and strengthening, causing additional concern despite local successes. When asked about regional cooperation, Dr. Torre reported that he works well with the Veracruz Secretary of Health and noted that fifteen health officials from Veracruz recently visited Ciudad Victoria to learn more about Tamaulipas' dengue-prevention programs. He also noted that increased bi-lateral cooperation with Texas health officials has been positive. Nuevo Leon, on the other hand, has been unresponsive and difficult to work with, according to Dr. Torre. Note. The rise in the incidence of dengue in Nuevo Leon represents the fastest rising rate of transmission in the country. End Note.

¶4. The state is also working to prevent the spread of

dengue-carrying mosquitoes with fumigation and garbage clean-up programs, but Dr. Torre noted that the fumigation only works if the poison comes into direct contact with mosquito larvae or airborne mosquitoes. "Relying on this alone doesn't work, which is why the education program is so important." Dr. Torre also said that the other half of his job is working with Tamaulipas hospitals and health clinics to get them "dengue secure certified", i.e. training doctors and nurses to identify dengue fever symptoms and posting public information about what to do if one suspects he/she has been infected. Dr. Torre said that in this respect, Tamaulipas is also making progress far beyond its neighboring Mexican states.

15. COMMENT. While Mexican states' responses to dengue have been varied (reftel), the Tamaulipas government has made a concerted effort to avoid the same inaction that led to thousands of dengue cases in the state in 2005. If other Mexican states can use Tamaulipas' experience as an example, perhaps a further rise in dengue cases can be mitigated in the coming year. However, as Dr. Torre stated, "People don't have a memory for things like [dengue].....they forget and they don't change their habits and the same thing happens again and again." States' success in combating dengue fever will also greatly depend on the continuity of state programs and funding, and on the continued commitment of health officials to remain vigilant.
END COMMENT.

16. The cable has been cleared with the U.S. Consulate in Matamoros.

WILLIAMSON